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ABSTRACT

On the basis of individuation approaches to the study of parent-adolescent relationships, this study hypothesized that connectedness and separation will be separately and jointly related to indicators of successful identity development. A sample of 968 students attending 7th and 10th grades was drawn to represent different German school tracks. The participants completed questionnaires that contained various scales of the parent-adolescent relationship and scales for adolescent self-esteem, depression, and loneliness. The relationship scales formed four factors: connectedness with mother, connectedness with father, separation from parents (mothers and fathers combined), and parental monitoring. The study found that connectedness with mother and with father were consistently related to positive measures of self-concept and emotional well-being. However, separation and low levels of monitoring were either inconsistently or negatively related to these dependent variables. Findings led to speculation whether less individuated relationships between parents and adolescents are healthier. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/HTH)

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Connectedness and Separation in Parent-Adolescent Relationships: Indicators of a Successful Identity Development?

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Abstract

On the basis of individuation approaches to the study of parent-adolescent relationships, it is hypothesized that connectedness and separation will be separately and jointly related to indicators of successful identity development. A sample of 968 students attending 7th and 10th grades was drawn to represent the different German school tracks. The participants completed questionnaires that contained various scales of the parent-adolescent relationship and scales for adolescent self-esteem, depression, and loneliness. The relationship scales formed four factors in a PCA: connectedness with mother, connectedness with father, separation from parents (mothers and fathers combined), and parental monitoring. Connectedness with mother and with father were consistently related to positive measures of self-concept and emotional well-being. However, separation and low levels of monitoring were either inconsistently or negatively related to these dependent variables. An advancement of individuation approach is discussed.

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1 Question

According to approaches to the study of individuation in adolescence, two dimensions of parent-adolescent relationships are especially important: Connectedness and separation (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Both play a role in identity development (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), albeit in other publications, identity development is defined as part of separation itself (e.g., Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987).

Self-evaluations are an important aspect of identity. Accordingly, we investigated whether separation and connectedness were separately or jointly related to adolescent positive or negative self-evaluations. In addition to self-esteem as the most central construct in the field of self-evaluations, we also measured depression and loneliness because the scales we employed to measure these constructs also contain items with self-evaluating content.

2 Method

2.1 Sample

This poster paper is the first presentation of the results of the Darmstadt Student Survey to an English-speaking audience. In the summer and fall 2000, a total of 968 male and female students attending 7th and 10th grades in a West German industrial city (approximately 135,000 inhabitants) were investigated. In Germany, the school system differs from the USA in that there are different school tracks, that, instead of providing sequential education to all students, provide education of different quality to different students. Most studies in Germany employ samples that are restricted to the intermediate and higher school tracks, resulting in a bias for children from well-educated middle-class families. Instead, the schools for the present study were selected to represent all of the different school tracks, according to statistical data of the federal state of Hesse (Hessisches Kultusministerium, 1999). The participants completed written questionnaires within two consecutive class periods at school (90 minutes). Often, students extended into the break to complete the survey. This study was part of the Cross-National Adolescent Project (C-NAP; Barber, 2001) that focuses on adolescent social and psychological functioning in their various social contexts.

2.2 Measures

Parent-adolescent relationships. A total of twelve scales indexing parent-adolescent relationships were included in the survey. A PCA with varimax rotation revealed four factors, (a) Connectedness with Mother and (b) Connectedness with Father, (c) Separation from Parents, and (d)

Parental Monitoring. Scales loading highly on common factors were recoded to uniform scale ranges and then summed. The following analyses thus were not based on factor scores but on scale sums that were intercorrelated.

Connectedness with Mother. This factor was made up of the following scales: (a) Adolescent Specific Connectedness (e.g., "Every now and then I like to make her happy", 9 items, $\alpha = .82$), (b) Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Masche, 1999, extracted from FAM III, Kreppner & Spiel, 1992; Skinner, Steinhauer, & Santa-Barbara, 1983; e.g., "She is always there for me if I want to talk to her", 15 items, $\alpha = .87$), (c) Emotional Helps By Mothers (basic idea in Projektgruppe Bildungsmoratorium, 1994; e.g., "Give encouragement in difficult situations", 5 items, $\alpha = .86$) and (d) Emotional Helps For Mothers (the same 5 Items, $\alpha = .83$).

Connectedness with Father. This factor was comprised of the same scales as for the *Connectedness with Mother* factor. The respective alphas were: .85, .90, .89, and .87.

Separation from Parents. This factor consisted of the following sub-scales (a) Decisional Autonomy Towards Mother (e.g., "It is my concern and not hers on what I spend my money", 10 items, $\alpha = .78$) and (b) Decisional Autonomy Towards Father ($\alpha = .79$).

Parental Monitoring. Parental Monitoring was measured separately for mothers and fathers with a scale often used in research on adolescents (e.g., Brown, Mounts, Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993; e.g., "How much does your mother REALLY know... What you do with your free time?", 5 items for mothers, $\alpha = .79$; 5 items for fathers, $\alpha = .83$).

Self-evaluation/Emotional Well-being. Four separate scales loaded highly on a common factor in a PCA. Results of analyses of each scale separately were compared with multivariate analyses of all scales combined, checking whether the significant results were the same in both sets of analyses. The four scales were: (a) the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; e.g., "I take a positive attitude toward myself", 10 items, $\alpha = .85$), (b) the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1992; e.g., "I hate myself/I do not like myself/I like myself", 10 items, $\alpha = .78$), (c) Depression (CBCL; adapted from Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987; e.g., "I am unhappy, sad, or depressed", 5 items, $\alpha = .77$), and (d) the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; e.g., "I feel left out", 4 items, $\alpha = .79$).

3 Results

The four self-evaluation scales were first regressed on the four parent-adolescent relationship scales in univariate regressions testing linear, quadratic, and cubic functions. The results of the linear regressions will be depicted in the figures, except if the quadratic regressions explained significantly ($p < .05$) higher proportions of variance. The cubic regressions never were superior

to the linear or quadratic regressions. In order to give a numeric estimate of the effect size, correlation coefficients also will be reported.

MANOVAs were computed next. In the first step of analyses, only the four relationship variables were entered into the equation as covariates. In the second step, gender and grade were added as between-subjects factors. Finally, school track was added as an additional factor that had four categories: Gymnasium and similar (college bound track, 13 years of schooling), Realschule and similar (non college bound track, 10 years of schooling), Hauptschule and similar (lowest track, 9 and sometimes 10 years of schooling), and Integrierte Gesamtschule (a blend of the other three school tracks). By planned contrasts, the latter three tracks were each compared to the first one (Gymnasium). The numerous results of these calculations will be presented only in so far as they complement or challenge the results of the univariate analyses. In general, however, the relationships between the measures of the parent-adolescent relationship and self-evaluation and well-being persisted after the introduction of gender, grade, and school track into the analyses.

3.1 Relationships with Connectedness with Mother

Figure 1 shows the relationships between Connectedness with Mother and the self-concept measures. Here and elsewhere these measures were recoded to a uniform range from zero to twenty in order to allow depiction of all scales in joint figures.

The higher the Connectedness with Mother, the

- higher the self-esteem ($r = .37, p < .001$)
- less the depression according to the CDI ($r = -.35, p < .001$)
- less the depression according to the CBCL ($r = -.28, p < .001$)
- less feelings of loneliness ($r = -.25, p < .001$)

3.2 Relationships with Connectedness with Father

Figure 2 depicts the results for the associations between Connectedness with Father and the self-evaluation variables.

The higher the Connectedness with Father, the

- higher the self-esteem ($r = .38, p < .001$; quadratic trend: $R^2 = .14, p < .001$)
- lower the depression according to the CDI ($r = -.37, p < .001$)
- lower the depression according to the CBCL ($r = -.34, p < .001$)
- less feelings of loneliness ($r = -.30, p < .001$; quadratic trend: $R^2 = .10, p < .001$)

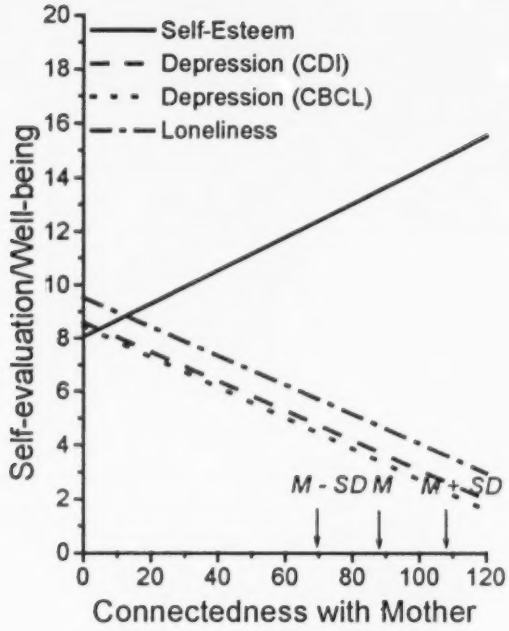

Figure 1. Relationships between Self-evaluation/Emotional Well-being and Connectedness with Mother.

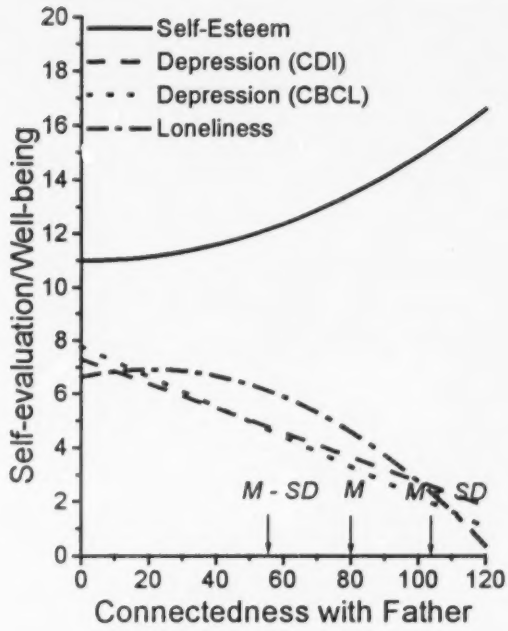

Figure 2. Relationships between Self-evaluation/Emotional Well-being and Connectedness with Father.

Although the quadratic regressions at times explained higher proportions of variance, in the part of the x-axis of Figure 2 where most data were located, the quadratic regression lines are very similar to linear ones.

For ease of interpretation, the Connectedness with Mother and with Father measures were calculated not as factor scores but as sums of the respective sub-scales. Thus, they were intercorrelated (r = .53). When the Connectedness with Father and Connectedness with Mother scales were jointly entered into the equations, regression weights attenuated by a magnitude of .11-.16.

3.3 Relationships with Separation from Parents

Results are shown in Figure 3.

The higher the Separation from Parents, the

- higher the depression according to the CDI (r = .07, p = .054)
- higher the depression according to the CBCL (r = .14, p < .001)
- more intense the feelings of loneliness (r = .14, p < .001; quadratic trend: R^2 = .03, p < .001)

Separation from Parents was correlated negatively with Connectedness with Mother (r = -.20) and with Connectedness with Father (r = -.25). When all relationship scales were entered jointly into multivariate regression equations, in contrast to the results above, the higher the Separation from Parents, the *lower* was the depression according to the CDI, and the *higher* was the self-esteem. Depression according to the CBCL and loneliness were not significantly related to Separation from Parents. This inversion of effects can be interpreted as a suppressor effect. In light of these equivocal results between the univariate and multivariate analyses, the effects of Separation from Parents (as mentioned earlier) do not seem to be independent from the effects of Connectedness with Mother and Father.

There were no interaction effects between Separation from Parents and either of the Connectedness measures.

3.4 Relationships with Parental Monitoring

Results are presented in Figure 4.

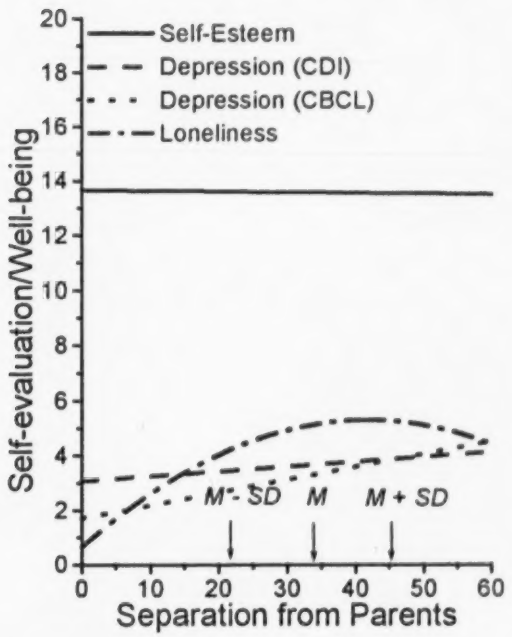

Figure 3. Relationships between Self-evaluation/Emotional Well-being and Separation from Parents.

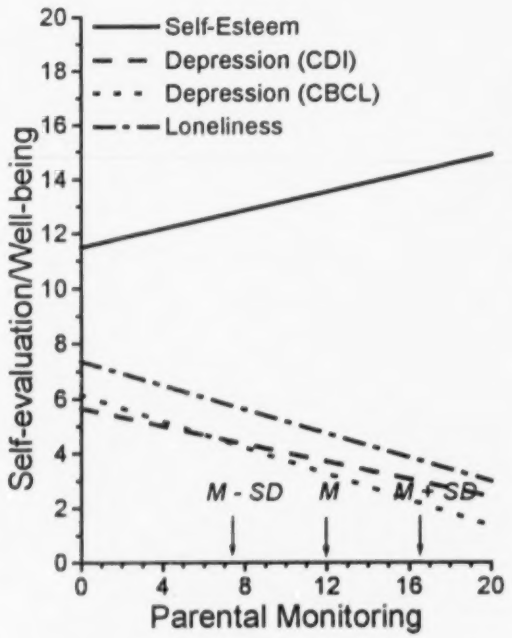

Figure 4. Relationships between Self-evaluation/Emotional Well-being and Parental Monitoring.

The more adolescents reported their parents knowing of their activities, the

- higher the self-esteem ($r = .22, p < .001$)
- lower the depression according to the CDI ($r = -.23, p < .001$)
- lower the depression according to the CBCL ($r = -.27, p < .001$)
- less feelings of loneliness ($r = -.21, p < .001$)

Due to correlations between Parental Monitoring and Connectedness with Mother ($r = .37$) and Connectedness with Father ($r = .49$), the regression weights were attenuated by a magnitude of .13/.14 when all variables were analyzed simultaneously. Still, with the exception of loneliness, all relationships remained significant ($p < .05$). Reports of Parental Monitoring were higher in seventh grade than in tenth grade ($F(1, 734) = 9.02, p = .003, \eta^2 = .01$) and lower in Realschule than in Gymnasium ($F(3, 734) = 2.99, p = .030, \eta^2 = .01$, $contrast_{Gymnasium/Realschule} = 1.23$; $SE = .42$; $p = .003$). After introducing grade, gender, and school track into the equations, only the relationship between Parental Monitoring and depression (CBCL) remained significant ($\beta = -.13, p = .002$).

4 Discussion

Adolescents who felt connected with their mothers and fathers, who were satisfied with their relationships with their parents, and who exchanged emotional support with them, were more satisfied with themselves, less depressed, and less lonely. These results are consistent with and extend those of an earlier study (Masche, 2000). Connectedness with both parents explained 10 % of variance in all self-evaluation and emotional well-being measures, the same proportion of variance that was explained by gender, grade, and school track combined.

For Separation from Parents, however, positive relationships with the outcome measures were not found despite a theoretically expected age progression in separation from parents ($F(1, 734) = 36.15; \eta^2 = .05; p < .001$). For Parental Monitoring, a normative age decline was discerned ($F(1, 734) = 9.02; \eta^2 = .01, p = .003$), as in earlier samples (e.g., Masche, 1998). Nevertheless, higher levels of parental monitoring were linked to a more positive self-concept.

Do these findings imply that less individuated relationships between parents and adolescents are the healthier ones? Is remaining in child-like parent-adolescent relationships better than growing-up? Youniss (Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987) postulated that identity development is enhanced by parent-adolescent connectedness. Grotevant and Cooper (1985; Cooper et al., 1983), on the other hand, emphasized the importance of the separation of one's own ideas *as expressed in parent-adolescent communication* to identity exploration. The separation scale employed in our study was constructed according to Youniss and Smollar's (1985) description of separation. Possibly, this description overemphasized autonomy in terms

of seclusion from parents. Perhaps, it is not this type of separation that is the *via regia* of development but the acquisition of competencies that allow for meeting everyday and life decisions in the context of a close but respectful relationship with parents.

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